



**City of Los Altos**

# **Business Resource Guide**

**PREPARED BY:**

**CITY OF LOS ALTOS  
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT MANAGER**

**April 2012**



## Introduction

Welcome to the City of Los Altos! We thank you for choosing Los Altos as the location for your business. The City's Economic Development Manager has prepared this Business Resource Guide in cooperation with other City Departments to provide key information for starting a business within Los Altos. The Guide includes both City-specific information and also some contact information to assist you with County and State requirements.

The City's Economic Development Manager functions as a staff liaison to assist existing and potential businesses in their efforts with the City. The Economic Development Manager is available to guide new businesses through the City regulatory process to assist the business with getting all their required approvals and permits. The Economic Development Manager can be reached at (650) 947-2620. Please feel free to call anytime with questions about the process of establishing a business.

## Permit and License Requirements

### Zoning Approval

Before signing a lease or contract, it is highly recommended that you contact the City to verify that your business complies with the zoning requirements for the proposed location. All new businesses and any businesses that are relocating are required to obtain zoning approval. Different types of businesses and uses are listed in the zoning regulations as either a permitted use or a conditional use. The types of business which are permitted uses and conditional uses vary between the different commercial areas of the City. The Planning Director determines which uses are allowed in each zone subject to the City's zoning regulations. Zoning review is required before you can obtain a City business license and prior to applying for a building permit to make interior or exterior changes to the building for your business.

In order to obtain zoning approval, you must complete the ***Application for Zoning Approval*** form and submit the completed form and \$100 processing fee with your business license application. If you have questions regarding the eligibility of your business, please contact the Economic Development Manager at (650) 947-2620.

### Business License

If you are planning on opening a business within the City of Los Altos or conducting business within the City limits, you must first obtain a business license. The ***Business License Tax Application*** is available on the City's website or at the Front Counter at City Hall.

You will need to obtain a new Business License if you are:

- Starting a new business
- Purchasing an existing business
- Opening an additional location for your current business
- Moving your business to a new location within the City of Los Altos

The Business License fee is based on the type of business and the number of employees located at the place of business. Business Licenses must be renewed annually.

For questions about the Business License application process, please call the Finance Department at (650) 947-2620.

## **Building Renovations**

If you are planning any renovations to the interior or the exterior of the building, you will require Planning review of your proposed improvements and a building permit prior to constructing the improvements. Depending on the extent of your proposed improvements, you may want to discuss your plans with Planning Staff before starting architectural drawings. Planning Staff can walk you through the process of obtaining the proper permits for your proposed work and can identify any issues you may not be aware of, such as historic designations. You can visit Planning Staff at the Planning Counter at City Hall or by calling (650) 947-2750.

Some of the commercial construction activities which require permits are:

- Exterior renovations
- Installation or replacement of awnings
- Exterior signage
- Mechanical equipment and equipment enclosures
- Interior renovations
- Change in paint color
- Change in windows

Some tenant improvements may involve work in the public right-of-way (public property). Typical activities are:

- Landscaping and irrigation
- Sidewalk repairs
- Tree removals
- Storm drainage
- Sewer connections

Activities in the public right-of-way require permits from Engineering Division. The Engineering Staff may be reached at the Engineering Counter or at (650) 947-2780.

## **Sign Permits**

Most signs require design review and building permits prior to installation. Design review is performed by Planning Staff and this process takes about two to three weeks. It is essential to begin the design review process as early as possible, and especially before the sign is made. Sometimes sign designs need to be modified to gain design approval and comply with City standards. Planning Staff can provide you with information about the sign regulations and application process at the Planning Counter or by calling (650) 947-2750.

If your business location is in a multi-tenant building, there may be what is called a “master sign program” which sets forth the guidelines which must be followed. You can check with the property owner or Planning Staff to find out if a master sign program applies to your location.

New businesses often want to establish their identity and location with the help of temporary signs such as banners. Such signage is permitted on a limited basis subject to the sign regulations.

### **Requirements for Restaurants**

Because restaurants serve food and are gathering places for a larger number of people than small retail shops, they come under closer scrutiny by approving agencies. The following is a list of various issues the Planning and Building Staff needs to address in connection with the conversion of an existing commercial building to a restaurant, or the remodeling of an existing restaurant in the City of Los Altos:

1. Restaurants are permitted uses in most commercial districts; however they require a parking analysis as they require more parking spaces than retail businesses.
2. Seating capacity must be in accordance with Uniform Building Code (UBC) and Uniform Fire Code (UFC) requirements. Outside seating will require an ***Outdoor Display Permit***.
3. Engineering and Planning Staff will have to review the trash enclosure area for capacity, roofing and fire safety.
4. The facility must comply with the standards of the State of California Title 24 accessibility requirements.
5. Grease traps are required. Please see the Building Division for details.

Evidence of approval from the Santa Clara County Health Department is required with Building Plan submittal at City Hall. Final Health Department approval must be received before the City of Los Altos can issue building permits or a business license.

### **Building and Fire Department Inspections**

Before opening for business, safety inspections of your business site should be completed by Building and Fire Staff. Please be aware that fees may be charged for such inspections. Improvements may be needed to correct health and safety problems with the building and/or equipment. Please do not assume that because the previous owner used the existing location (or equipment) that it met code and that a new business will be able to open or operate in the same location. Sometimes improvements were made without benefit of building permits. For additional information on safety inspections, contact the City of Los Altos Building Division at (650) 947-2752 and the Santa Clara County Fire Department at (408) 378-4010.

### **Garbage Requirements**

Every business in Los Altos is required to have garbage service. Please contact Mission Trail Waste Systems for fees and services. They can be reached at (650) 473-1400.

Any changes to the design or location of the garbage enclosures for a particular building will need to be reviewed by the Planning and Building Divisions who can be reached at the Planning or Building Counters or at (650) 947-2750 or 947-2752, respectively.

## **Additional Information for Downtown Businesses**

### **Outdoor Display Permits**

The City of Los Altos has an Outdoor Display program that gives downtown restaurant and store owners the opportunity to promote their business through the use of outdoor seating, special displays and menu board signs. This program is intended to assist businesses in attracting customers and to improve the overall vibrancy of the downtown.

In order to participate in the Outdoor Display program, it is necessary to obtain a permit from the City. The permit is needed to provide the City with design review to ensure quality displays and in order to provide liability insurance to protect the City in case of any claims that may arise. Permits are required for all sidewalk displays, regardless of whether they are located on public or private property. The fee for the permits is \$50. Permit review is typically completed within a week. No annual renewals are required except to keep the liability insurance up to date for displays on the public sidewalk. For more information on the Outdoor Display program, contact the Economic Development Manager at (650) 947-2620.

### **Downtown Employee Parking Permits**

The Downtown Employee Parking Permit Program provides all-day parking for downtown business owners and employees. All business owners and employees within the Downtown Parking District are eligible to purchase permits. Permits are transferrable and can be shared by part-time employees. The Downtown Parking District includes the properties in the core of the downtown triangle that do not have off-street parking.

Permit parking is only available in the North and South Parking Plazas in spaces designated with a white dot. Permits are available at the Los Altos Police Station. The cost of an annual permit is \$36. Annual permits are valid from October 1<sup>st</sup> through September 30<sup>th</sup>. Quarterly permits are also available for \$12. Permits are available for purchase at the Los Altos Police Station at the Civic Center complex at One North San Antonio Road.

## **Key Contacts for Businesses**

**Alcohol Sales:** If your business involves sales of beer, wine or liquor, a permit or special licensing will be needed through the State. Contact the California Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control at (408) 277-1200 or go to [www.abc.ca.gov](http://www.abc.ca.gov) for more information.

**Chamber of Commerce:** The Los Altos Chamber of Commerce acts as a business advocate for local businesses. It is the collective voice of business in the seven commercial districts which make up the City of Los Altos. As a member of the Chamber of Commerce you have access to local full-time Chamber professionals who have a broad range of skills and knowledge to assist with your

business needs. Members can also share information and networking opportunities at the Chamber mixers and by participating on the many Chamber committees. The Los Altos Chamber of Commerce can be reached at (650) 948-1455.

**Fictitious Business Name:** If you invent a name for your business other than your own, the name is considered a fictitious business name. All businesses should register their fictitious business name with the Santa Clara County Clerk's Office before obtaining a business license from the City of Los Altos. Contact the Santa Clara County Clerk's Office at (408) 299-2481.

**Food/Health Permits:** If your business involves selling or handling food, a permit from the Health Department is required. Improvements and/or inspections of the building and facilities may also be needed. Contact the Santa Clara County Environmental Health Department at (408) 918-3400.

**Garbage Service:** Please contact Mission Trail Waste Systems for fees and services. They can be reached at (650) 473-1400 or at [www.missiontrail.com/LosAltos](http://www.missiontrail.com/LosAltos).

**Los Altos Mediation Program (L.A.M.P.):** All businesses operating in Los Altos can use the Los Altos Mediation Program (L.A.M.P.) which offers a voluntary settlement process used to resolve conflicts between two or more people in a non-adversarial setting with the aid of a neutral third party. The conflict could be business to business or a merchant-customer disagreement. The L.A.M.P. process increases communications, promotes understanding and builds a stronger business community. L.A.M.P. can be reached at (650) 949-5267.

**Los Altos Village Association (LAVA):** The Los Altos Village Association (LAVA) was established in 1963 to be a cohesive group of business members working together to promote economic growth and to preserve the uniqueness of the downtown community. LAVA works to promote downtown business primarily via advertising and special events. LAVA also acts as a link between the City of Los Altos and downtown businesses. LAVA can be reached at (650) 949-5282.

**NOVA (Workforce Development Center):** NOVA is a nonprofit, federally-funded employment and training agency that provides customer-focused workforce development services. They work with local employers to provide assistance for staffing and recruitment, on-the-job training, layoff and outplacement assistance, and employee training and professional development. NOVA can be reached at (408) 730-7830 or at [www.novaworks.org](http://www.novaworks.org).

**Small Business Development Center (SBDC):** The Small Business Administration (SBA) of the U.S. Federal Government offers many forms of assistance for small businesses through their Small Business Development Centers (SBDC). Assistance is available to anyone interested in starting a small business or improving or expanding an existing small business. SBDC services include help with financial, marketing, production, organization, engineering and technical problems and feasibility studies. Special SBDC activities include services for inventors with patentable products, international trade centers, business law information and guidance, procurement matching assistance, venture capital formation and small business incubators. The local SBDC can be reached at (408) 351-3602.

# Frequently Called Numbers

## **Los Altos City Hall (<http://www.losaltosca.gov>)**

Building Department	(650) 947-2752
Business Licenses/Finance	(650) 947-2760
City Hall (Main Number)	(650) 947-2700
City Manager	(650) 947-2605
Economic Development	(650) 947-2620
Engineering Department	(650) 947-2780
Maintenance Services Center	(650) 947-2785
Planning Department	(650) 947-2750
Police Department	(650) 947-2770
Recreation	(650) 947-2790

## **Outside of City Hall**

California Water Service <a href="http://www.calwater.com">http://www.calwater.com</a>	(650) 917-0152
Los Altos Chamber of Commerce <a href="http://www.losaltoschamber.org">http://www.losaltoschamber.org</a>	(650) 948-455
Los Altos Village Association (LAVA) <a href="http://www.downtownlosaltos.org">http://www.downtownlosaltos.org</a>	(650) 949-5282
Mission Trail Waste Systems (Garbage Service) <a href="http://www.missiontrail.com/LosAltos">http://www.missiontrail.com/LosAltos</a>	(650) 473-1400
Pacific Gas & Electric Company (PG&E) <a href="http://www.pge.com">http://www.pge.com</a>	(800) 743-5000
Santa Clara County Fire Department <a href="http://www.sccfd.org">http://www.sccfd.org</a>	(408) 378-4010